

Appendix G- Agency Coordination Plan



SOUTHWEST
transitway

green means go.

Coordination Plan for the Preparation of the Southwest Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement

September 2008



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1.0 OVERVIEW

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Southwest Transitway is a proposed transit project intended to improve mobility in the southwest part of the Twin Cities metro area including the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, Edina, St. Louis Park, and Minneapolis. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) have initiated a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Southwest Transitway Project for proposed high capacity transit improvements. The DEIS will focus on the No-Build, Transportation System Management (TSM) and three alternative light rail transit (LRT) routes that evolved from the Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis (AA). The study area and the three potential LRT routes are depicted in Figure 1.

The DEIS will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and provisions of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

LRT Alternatives to be Considered

Light Rail Transit 1A: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (TH 5) via an extension of the Hiawatha LRT tracks on 5th Street, past the downtown Minneapolis Intermodal Station to Royalston Avenue, to the Kenilworth Corridor through Minneapolis and the HCRRA property through St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka and Eden Prairie terminating at TH 5 and the HCRRA's property. Stations are proposed at Royalston Avenue, Van White Boulevard, Penn Avenue, 21st Street, West Lake Street, Beltline Boulevard, Wooddale Avenue, Louisiana Avenue, Blake Road, downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Road, Rowland Road, TH 62, and TH 5.

Light Rail Transit 3A: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (Mitchell Road/TH 5) via an extension of the Hiawatha LRT tracks on 5th Street, past the downtown Minneapolis Intermodal Station to Royalston Avenue, to the Kenilworth Corridor through Minneapolis, the HCRRA property in St. Louis Park and Hopkins, to new right-of-way through the Opus/Golden Triangle area, the Eden Prairie Major Center area terminating at TH 5 and Mitchell Road. Stations are proposed at Royalston Avenue, Van White Boulevard, Penn Avenue, 21st Street, West Lake Street, Beltline Boulevard, Wooddale Avenue, Louisiana Avenue, Blake Road, downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Road, Opus, City West, Golden Triangle, Eden Prairie Town Center, SouthWest Station, and Mitchell Road.

Light Rail Transit 3C: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (Mitchell Road/TH 5) via Nicollet Mall to Nicollet Avenue (tunnel from Franklin Avenue to 28th Street), the Midtown Corridor through Minneapolis, the HCRRA property in St. Louis Park and Hopkins, to new right-of-way through the Opus/ Golden Triangle, the Eden Prairie Major Center area terminating at TH 5 and Mitchell Road. Stations are proposed at 4th Street, 8th Street, 12th Street, Franklin Avenue, 28th Street, Lyndale Avenue, Hennepin Avenue, West Lake Street, Beltline Boulevard, Wooddale Avenue, Louisiana Avenue, Blake Road, downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Road, Opus, City West, Golden Triangle, Eden Prairie Town Center, SouthWest Station, and Mitchell Road.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternative: The Enhanced Bus alternative, also known as the TSM Alternative, is designed to provide low cost, operationally-oriented

improvements to address the project's purpose and need as much as possible without a major transit investment. It includes modifications to the existing express service, and would augment Metro Transit and Southwest Metro Transit service to Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, and St. Louis Park. Local service would be restructured to provide access to the new limited stop service. These routes would begin by serving selected stops, then travel non-stop on the regional highways using bus shoulder lanes and/or the I-394 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane into downtown Minneapolis. This would allow the limited stop services to offer more attractive travel times, and would increase options for commuters in the corridor. This alternative will serve as the New Starts Baseline against which the cost-effectiveness of the proposed project will be measured, and includes improvements identified in the No-Build Alternative. The Enhanced Bus Option is shown in Figure 2.

No-Build Alternative: The No-Build Alternative includes all roadway and transit facility and service improvements (other than the proposed project) planned, programmed, and included in the Financially Constrained Regional Transportation Policy Plan to be implemented by the Year 2030. It includes minor transit service expansions and/or adjustments that reflect a continuation of existing service policies as identified by the Metropolitan Council. The No-Build Alternative serves as the NEPA baseline against which the potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts of other proposed alternatives, including the proposed project, will be measured.

Figure 1 LRT Alternatives

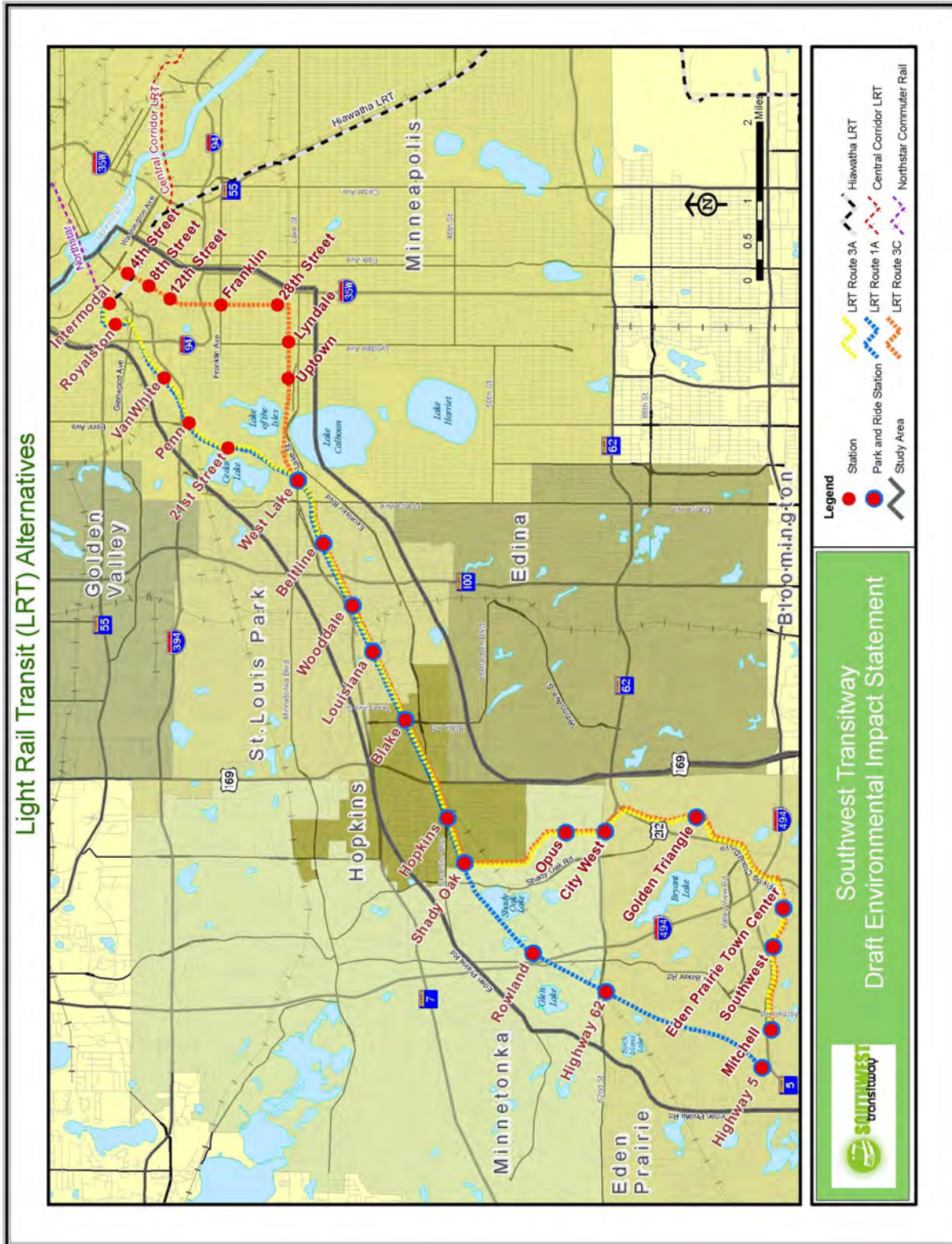
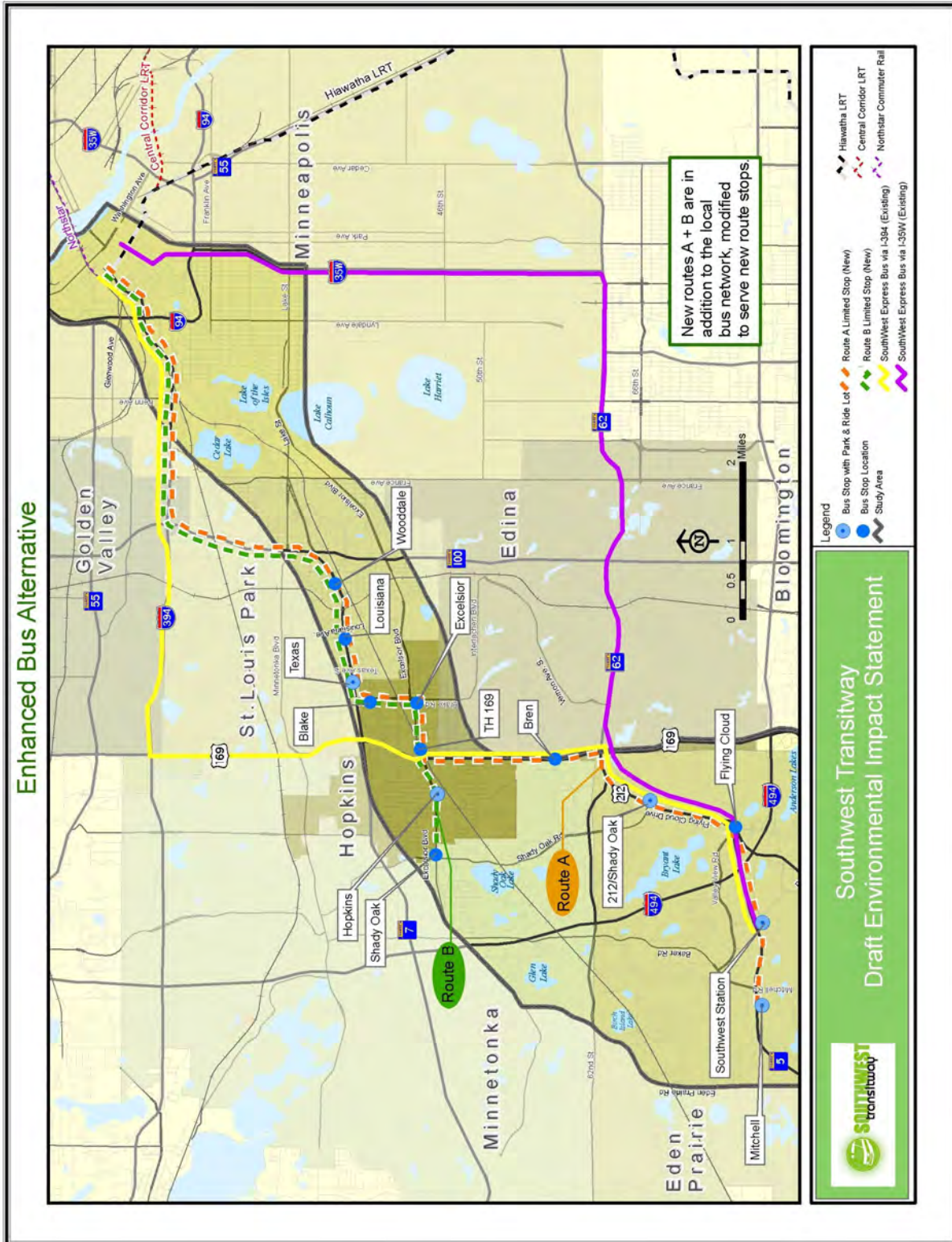


Figure 2 Enhanced Bus Alternative



Three primary factors make the Southwest Transitway project important for people who live and work in the southwest metro area: 1) growing roadway congestion; 2) lack of competitive, reliable transit options for choice riders and transit dependent persons; and 3) lack of reverse commute transit service.

To aid in determining which alternatives would meet the area needs, five goals tiered by importance were developed during the AA.

1. Improves mobility.
2. Provides a cost-effective, efficient travel option.
3. Protects the environment.
4. Preserves the quality of life.
5. Supports economic development.

1.2 PURPOSE OF COORDINATION PLAN

The Southwest Transitway Project Coordination Plan provides the structure for coordination between FTA, HCRRA, participating agencies, and the public during the process of preparing a DEIS to satisfy the requirements of NEPA and its implementing regulations, SAFETEA-LU and the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), Chapter 4410 Environmental Quality Board (EQB) Environmental Review Program.

SAFETEA-LU was signed into law on August 10, 2005, refining the programmatic framework for Federal surface transportation projects. SAFETEA-LU includes several provisions intended to enhance the consideration of environmental issues and impacts within the transportation planning process including Section 6002 for Efficient Environmental Reviews for Project Decision-making.

Among the tools mandated by Section 6002, is the lead agency's development of a Coordination Plan, addressing how coordination and communication with agencies and the public will occur throughout the NEPA process. This is further summarized below.

1.2.1 Coordination with Participating Agencies

A participating agency is a federal, state, tribal, or local government agency that has an interest in the project and has agreed to participate in the scoping and NEPA processes. Participating agencies play a critical role in defining the project and identifying issues of concern in areas such as purpose and need, range of alternatives, and methodologies.

SAFETEA-LU establishes a 30-day maximum comment period that will be enforced throughout the duration of the project to facilitate a timely review. If an agency feels it has been wrongly classified or tasked with inappropriate responsibilities, that agency should contact FTA or HCRRA to coordinate on the appropriate level of involvement.

This plan presents roles and responsibilities of the lead and participating agencies and the opportunities for participation at several steps in the DEIS process, including the following:

- Publication of the Notice of Intent and scoping activities
- Development of purpose and need
- Identification of the range of alternatives
- Collaboration on methodologies
- Identification of the Preferred Alternative and the level of design detail
- Completion of the DEIS

1.2.2 Opportunities for Public Involvement

The project will include ongoing public involvement, as summarized below and further detailed in the project's separate Public Involvement Plan (PIP).

HCRRA will conduct a PIP during the development of the DEIS. A project database of stakeholders, property owners, elected officials, community groups and organizations, Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) members along with a schedule of initial stakeholder meetings is being developed, and is under review by HCRRA. The project database and the PIP will be refined to incorporate public input. Notice of scheduled project meetings will be published in local papers and community news letters in the project area, and posted to the project Web site: www.southwesttransitway.org.

Project newsletters will be developed prior to the public and agency meetings and distributed throughout the community. A Web site for the project has been established and will be updated on a regular basis to provide the most current information about the project. Alternatively, interested residents may provide contact information to receive project updates or ask questions.

Opportunities for community interaction and input will occur at important milestones throughout the study process as listed below:

- Scoping
- Evaluation and screening methodology
- Conceptual engineering design of alternatives
- Conclusion of the Evaluation of Alternatives
- Preparation of the DEIS
- Recommend Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)
- Completion of the DEIS
- Adoption of the LPA

Section 3 provides additional information about these milestones.

2.0 AGENCIES AND ROLES

2.1 LEAD AGENCIES

The lead agencies must perform the functions that they have traditionally performed in preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with 23 CFR part 771 and 40 CFR parts 1500-1508. In addition, the lead agencies must identify and involve participating agencies; develop coordination plans; provide opportunities for public and participating agency involvement in defining the purpose and need and determining the range of alternatives; and collaborate with participating agencies in determining methodologies and the level of detail for the analysis of the alternatives. Lead agencies also must provide increased oversight in managing the process and resolving issues. This project has two lead agencies: FTA and HCRRA.

2.1.1 Federal Transit Administration

FTA is the lead federal lead agency. FTA's responsibilities include the following:

- Ensure that the EIS required under NEPA is completed in accordance with SAFETEA-LU and applicable federal law.
- Provide oversight in managing the process and resolving issues.
- Facilitate the timely and adequate delivery of the environmental review process.
- Be responsible for the content of the EIS, furnish guidance, independently evaluate and approve documents, and ensure that project sponsors comply with mitigation commitments.
- In consultation with the joint lead agency and after consideration of input from the public and participating agencies, make the decision regarding the purpose and need used in the NEPA evaluation and range of alternatives to be evaluated in the NEPA document.
- Accept the identification of the LPA.
- Decide, in consultation with the joint lead agency, whether to develop the LPA to a higher level of detail.

2.1.2 HCRRA

HCRRA is the project sponsor and joint lead agency for the NEPA process. HCRRA's responsibilities include:

- Refine the definitions and analysis of the alternatives that were deemed feasible by the AA.
- Prepare an environmental document that assesses the impacts of the alternatives.
- Identify means and methods to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts.
- Recommend a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA).
- Identify and involve participating agencies.
- Develop coordination plans.
- Provide information that will serve as a basis for public and participating agency input on key decisions that will be made by FTA and HCRRA.
- Provide opportunities for public and participating agency involvement in defining the purpose and need.

- Collaborate with participating agencies in determining methodologies and the level of detail for the analysis of alternatives.

2.2 PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

Participating agencies are those with an interest in the project. The standard for participating agency status is more encompassing than the standard for cooperating agency status defined by NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1508.5).

2.2.1 Responsibilities of Participating Agencies

The responsibilities of the participating agencies will be as follows:

- Provide input on the Southwest Transitway Project.
- Participate in the NEPA process starting at the earliest possible time.
- Identify, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts or any issues that could substantially delay or prevent an agency from granting a permit or other approval needed for the project.
- Work cooperatively with HCRRA to resolve any issues that could result in denial of any approvals for the project.
- Participate in the issues resolution process identified in this document.
- Provide input on the purpose and need, methodologies, and level of detail to be used in the analysis of alternatives.
- Provide input on how the performance of alternatives will be evaluated or how the impacts of alternatives on various resources will be assessed.
- Provide meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues.
- Provide written comment within 15 days of the receipt of information and request for comment at each of the NEPA milestones listed in Section 3.

2.2.2 Agencies Invited to Participate as Participating Agencies

The following agencies will be invited:

Federal Agencies

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Blythe Semmer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Tamara Cameron
U.S. Department of Agriculture, William Lorenzen
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Environmental Policy & Compliance
U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)/Federal Highway Administration, Cheryl Martin
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Kenneth Westlake
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, Tom Jensen
U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Edward Buikema
U.S. Federal Railroad Administration, Regional Administrator
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities Field office, Tony Sullins, Field Supervisor
U.S. Homeland Security

State Agencies

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Rick Newquist, Supervisor
Minnesota Department of Health, Environmental Health Division

Minnesota Department of Transportation, Jenny Ross
Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, John Larson
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Steve Colvin
Indian Affairs Council, Annamarie Hill, Executive Director
Board of Water and Soil Resources, Jim Haertel
Office of the State Archaeologist
Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Becky Balk
Minnesota Department of Commerce, Susan Medhaug
State Historic Preservation Office
Minnesota Historical Society, Nina Archabal, Director

Regional Authorities

Metropolitan Council, Peter Bell, Chair
Metro Transit
Three Rivers Park District
Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, Eric Evenson, District Administrator
Nine Mile Creek Watershed District, Bob Obermeyer, District Engineer
Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District, Bob Obermeyer, District Engineer
Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, Doug Snyder, Executive Director

County Agencies

Hennepin County Richard P. Johnson, County Administrator
Hennepin County Research, Planning and Development, Kristine Martin, Director
Hennepin Conservation District

Local Government Agencies / Municipalities

City of Minneapolis, City Managers Office
City of St. Louis Park, Tom Harmening, City Manager
City of Hopkins, Richard Getschow, City Manager
City of Edina, Gordon Hughes, City Manager
City of Minnetonka, John Gunyou, City Manager
City of Eden Prairie, Scott Neal, City Manager

Native American Tribes

TBD

School Districts / Universities

TBD

3.0 COORDINATION STRUCTURE

Coordination will be an ongoing process with increased emphasis at the following decision points in the project:

- Publication of the Notice of Intent and scoping activities.
- Development of the purpose and need.
- Evaluation of alternatives.
- Collaboration on methodologies.
- Identification of the LPA and the level of design detail.
- Preparation of the DEIS.
- Completion of the DEIS.

Coordination will be completed in several ways, depending on the needs at each individual step. The coordination will include meetings with participating agencies and the public, and correspondence with individual agencies related to areas of their expertise.

3.1 EARLY COORDINATION

Early coordination includes an opportunity for participating agencies and the public to provide input and guidance on the scope of the DEIS, purpose and need for the project, and range of alternatives. Concurrent with the Notice of Intent to prepare a DEIS, each potential participating agency will be provided with an invitation to become a participating agency, a scoping information package, and this draft Coordination Plan. The scoping information package includes project background, the proposed purpose and need, the proposed range of alternatives to be evaluated, and opportunities for public involvement.

An inter-agency scoping meeting will be held to discuss the issues listed above and to obtain agency input. Input may be provided verbally at the meeting or in writing by the due date stated in the Notice of Intent and scoping information package. An agency's intention to accept or decline the invitation to become a participating agency is not due until after the date of the inter-agency scoping meeting, which will be stated in the invitation letter.

After considering input from the participating agencies and the public, the lead agencies will decide the project's purpose and need. According to previous guidance issued by the Council on Environmental Quality, which was affirmed by Congress in its conference report on SAFETEA-LU, other Federal agencies should afford substantial deference to the FTA's articulation of the purpose and need for a transportation action.

Agencies that desire collaboration during the development of methods¹ that will be used to evaluate the effects of the alternatives on specific elements of the environment should identify their interest during the scoping process.

¹ The congressional Conference Report 109-203 (page 1048) accompanying SAFETEA-LU states: "Collaboration means a cooperative and interactive process. It is not necessary for the lead agency to reach consensus with the participating agencies on these issues; the lead agency must work cooperatively with the participating agencies and consider their views, but the lead agency remains responsible for decision-making."

3.2 COORDINATION DURING EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Coordination with the participating agencies will be ongoing. Communications with individual agencies will occur as needed to finalize methods and to collect data pertaining to the project.

A multidisciplinary approach for screening and evaluating alternatives will be implemented with the goal to select an LPA. The evaluation process will utilize qualitative and quantify factors such as ridership potential; right of way impacts, capital costs; land use; economic development, and environmental impacts; traffic issues; conceptual engineering; and public preferences. The DEIS will be prepared to assess, compare and contrast the impacts and benefits of the build alternatives compared to the No-Build Alternative, identify potential design alternatives to avoid or reduce adverse impacts, recommend means and methods to mitigate unavoidable adverse impacts and recommend an LPA.

Participating agencies will be invited to attend public meetings and to provide input during the DEIS process.

3.3 COORDINATION PRIOR TO ISSUANCE AND FOLLOWING ISSUANCE OF THE DEIS

Communications with individual agencies will continue as needed. Two opportunities for participating agencies and public involvement will be offered:

- **DEIS Preparation.** The purpose of these meetings is to focus input on issues that should be studied for the alternatives that may be evaluated in the DEIS. Input may be provided verbally at the meeting or in writing by the due date to be announced later. Agencies that desire coordination during the development of methods that will be used to evaluate the effects of the alternatives to be studied in the DEIS should identify their interest during the scoping process.
- **DEIS Circulation.** A Notice of Availability of the DEIS will be published in the *Federal Register*, and the participating agencies will receive a copy of the notice. During the public circulation period of the document, a public hearing will be held. The participating agencies and the public will be offered the opportunity to review and comment on the content of the DEIS.

4.0 ISSUE RESOLUTION PROCESS

The lead agency and participating agencies shall work cooperatively in accordance with this section to identify and resolve issues that could delay completion of the environmental review process or could result in denial of any approvals required for the project under applicable laws.

Based on information received from the lead agency, participating agencies shall identify, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts. Issues of concern include any issues that could substantially delay or prevent an agency from granting a permit or other approval that is needed for the project.

The following issue resolution process will be followed:

- Meetings will be held as needed during the course of the NEPA process to discuss and resolve issues.
- If issues are not being resolved in a timely manner:
 1. An official issue resolution meeting will be scheduled.
 2. If resolution cannot be achieved within 30 days following such a meeting and a determination has been made by the FTA that all information necessary to resolve the issues has been obtained, then
 3. FTA will notify the heads of all participating agencies, HCRRA, the Committee on Environment and Public Works of the Senate, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives, and the Council of Environmental Quality that a resolution could not be reached, and
 4. FTA will publish such notice in the *Federal Register*.